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Politics of desire: Exploring the ethnicity/sexuality intersectionality in South and East Asian men who have sex with men (MSM)

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'Intersectionality' has been used to interrupt dominant discourse surrounding LGB experiences, and has exposed their heterogeneity. Complexities of negotiating desire within a matrix of race/ethnicity and sexuality in South and East Asian men who have sex with men (MSM) has been under-explored in Black and Minority Ethnic LGB research. Our internet survey found discordance between sexual identities and sexual practices amongst Asian MSM. Many did not access LGB physical and cyberspaces, and some experienced abuse attributed to their race/ethnicity. Feeling undesired was read as a function of racism, but racism from Asian MSM, manifesting as dispreference for certain races/ethnicities, was also found. We also explored intersections between internalised racism and homophobia which affect the lived experience of diasporic Asian MSM.

Keywords: Ethnicity; gay/ bisexual men; homophobia; intersectionality; racism; sexuality.

LESBIAN, gay and bisexual (LGB) experiences have been homogenised in research by contrasting heterosexual with non-heterosexual sexualities (Fish, 2008). Such LGB research has focused mainly on White¹ middle-class samples, including few people from other ethnic groups (e.g. Bolding et al., 2007; Evans et al., 2007). Furthermore, black and minority ethnic (BME)² research does not usually acknowledge non-heterosexual sexual preferences (Greene, 1994). Even in BME-LGB research, the experiences of South Asian men who have sex with men (MSM)³ have been under-represented globally. In the UK, some surveys of BME-MSM have included South and East Asians, but these have mainly explored sexual health/behaviours, and homophobia or racism in London and south-east England (e.g. GALOP 1998, 2001). This

paper diverts from sexual health and focuses on the experiences and desires of South and East Asian MSM across England.

BME-MSM individuals in the UK can be viewed as metaminorities (minorities within a minority population) as they are minorities of both sexuality and race/ethnicity, living in a predominantly White and heterosexual area (das Nair, 2006). As a result of this, they experience multiple prejudices: homophobia and heterosexism, from the society in general, and the BME society in particular; and racism, from the society in general, and the majority-LGB community (ibid; Yip, 2008). Individuals may feel conflicting loyalties and pressure to choose between the two communities, not feeling part of either group completely (Greene, 1994), and conceal aspects of their identity to exist in both (Crawford et al., 2002).

¹ We follow the APA Style which requires the capitalisation of White and Black because they are proper nouns, not adjectives used to describe colour.

² BME is a term that is commonly used by government and non-governmental offices in the UK.

³ We use the term MSM to divest sexual activities/practices from specific sexual identity labels.

Racism can be explicit/overt (e.g. verbal abuse) and/or covert (e.g. being undesired due to one's colour) (Plummer, 1989). The effects of real or perceived oppression related to race/ethnicity have been associated with the experience of 'internalised racism' (IR), which manifests as negative attitudes, shame, or hatred to one's own race/ethnicity and/or racial/ethnic group and its culture and practices (Chuang, 1999; Han, 2007; Szymanski & Gupta, 2009); and can have cognitive, affective, and behavioural implications on the individual. Whether the prejudice and discrimination metaminorities experience is worse than those with a single subordinate identity (e.g. a gay White man) has been discussed in the literature (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Research has suggested that androcentrism (tendency to define prototypical person as male), ethnocentrism (tendency to define the norm as the dominant ethnic group) and heterocentrism (tendency to define heterosexuality as the norm) may cause people with intersecting identities to be perceived as non-prototypical members of their subordinate groups – resulting in 'intersectional invisibility' – whereby they are not recognised as members of their subordinate groups (ibid.). Thus the focus on inter-group differences between LGB people and others, has often overlooked intra-group differences (Fish, 2008). But when examining these intra-group differences, we need to move on from questioning which constellation of minority statuses are more 'worse off' than others, and identify the specific oppression experienced by particular metaminorities (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008); and intersectionality theory, as a research paradigm, is well suited to explore and listen to these marginalised voices (Hancock, 2007; Riggs & das Nair, 2012).

Intersectionality, as a framework, analyses how social and cultural categories intertwine (Knudsen, 2006) to create hierarchical systems of domination and suppression in society. It arose as a critique of radical feminism, which prioritised gender over other

factors that also had a role to play in the disenfranchisement of women, such as race and sexuality (hooks, 1984). The importance of considering intersectionality has been highlighted by McCall (2005), who observed that it offers an impetus to explore the experiences of those with multiply oppressed identities, and is a key method for identity-politics-based research. Intersectionality also problematises the homogenised constructs of oppressed identities and the lived experiences of those with such identities. Such a fractioning and pluralisation of identities and communities exposed that even within the margins, there were centres and more or other margins, that is, some people experienced oppression by the oppressed, *and* others. And yet, as Taylor (2005) suggests, intersectionality is but a 'common trope' that has yet to be 'fully interrogated' (paragraph 1.2).

There is limited literature exploring the experiences of diasporic Asian MSM. Han (2008) interviewed 15 Asian MSM, and almost all reported feeling unwelcome and inadequate in gay communities. Of the 145 respondents from 'The Low Down' survey of BME LGB people (GALOP, 2001), 88 per cent had experienced racist or homophobic abuse, with 57 per cent experiencing racism from the White LGB communities and 57 per cent experiencing homophobia from Asian, African and Caribbean communities. It is interesting to note there were only five South and East Asian respondents in this BME survey.

The politics of same-sex desire in the context of race/ethnic identities is a complex and sensitive issue. Evidence suggests that South and East Asian MSM experience rejection when attempting to forge a sexual or non-sexual relationship from White gay/bisexual individuals, and MSM of their own ethnic background (Chuang, 1999). The experiences and desires of BME-MSM are no longer limited to the 'scene' such as gay/bisexual bars, clubs and social spaces, but also cyberspaces. In fact, Evans et al. (2008) found an increasing number of BME-

MSM were using the internet to meet men. Poon et al. (2005) conducted online interviews with 21 men (mostly Chinese) in Canada who used gay chat rooms. Participants experienced isolation and reported a lack of positive social space for Asian MSM as they did not 'fit in' the scene. Because of these experiences, many used the internet as a source of support, and to meet men in a safe and anonymous manner.

In another study which examined racism (anti-Asian sentiments) expressed in profiles of White men on a gay social networking website, Riggs (2012) found that racist sentiments were expressed in distinct ways, by constructing racism as 'personal preference', by constructing Asian gay men as not 'real men', by constructing Asian gay men as a 'type', and by assuming that saying 'sorry' renders anti-Asian sentiment somehow acceptable. Although in this Australian study the number of people actually expressing such sentiments was relatively small, the author rightly points out that the 'potential impact' of such sentiments on the gay men who access these profiles may be substantial. This is perhaps reflected in the Poon et al. (2005) study (mentioned above), in that many of the Asian participants still preferred White men, with whiteness used as a measure of attractiveness, and other Asian MSM viewed as competitors for the limited number of White men. It is uncertain why most White people desire other White people, and Asian MSM also desire White people. It is unclear whether for Asian MSM this represents desire for the White body *per se*, or the opportunities coupling with a White man affords (Butler, das Nair & Thomas, 2010). This phenomenon of racialised desire has led to the coining of the terms 'potato queens' for people who prefer White men, 'rice queens' for (usually older) White men who prefer (usually younger) Asian men, and 'sticky rice' for Asian men who like other Asian men (Chuang, 1999). The British term 'curry queens', referring to White men who desire South Asian men, complements the culinary-themed argots.

These questions of the politics of desire have not been adequately addressed in literature because the issue is controversial, and sampling a large group is problematic – particularly due to lack of visibility of Asian MSM individuals in LGB spaces and MSM in BME/Asian spaces. Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore the experiences and desires of South and East Asian MSM related to seeking and meeting other MSM in England.

Methodology

There is a debate on the most suitable methodology to employ in intersectionality studies (see McCall, 2005), and Hancock (2007) recommends the use of multiple methods embracing empirical and theoretical perspectives. Therefore in this study, the quantitative survey (used to reach out to a large sample) which contains qualitative (free-text options) data, forms the empirical launch pad from which theoretical positions are explored. We decided an internet-based questionnaire was most appropriate owing to the wide geographical area that we were targeting, and because we were recruiting a sample known to be difficult to identify. Internet-based surveys also afford anonymity, which is crucial for such populations (who may not be out to others), and may encourage greater openness in responses. This is a commonly employed methodology for exploring sexual themes (Ross et al., 2005), and is gaining popularity in LGB research.

Inclusion criteria

We included English-speaking men who identified as being South Asian or East Asian; who had sex with men, or were interested in having sex with men, or had same-sex romantic and/or sexual desires. They had to be living in England and over 16 years of age, and give consent to take part in the study.

Internet survey

The questionnaire was made available on SurveyMonkey for 10 months. We publicised

the study through national and regional LGB groups (particularly those who dealt with Asian LGB groups/issues), who advertised the study in their in-house publications and websites. We also contacted BME and LGBT student groups at universities in the East Midlands, and LGB venues in Nottingham. A strength of our recruitment was that information about the study was not placed only on sexual interest/contact websites, but also on general forums that attracted Asian men. Hardcopies of the questionnaire with return envelopes were provided to organisations on request. As social internet sites have been employed to contact potential participants for research (Bolding et al., 2004), we sought permission from two such popular websites, but were not permitted to advertise the study on their websites. We also used snowballing to boost recruitment.

Ethnicity and Sexuality Questionnaire

We developed this questionnaire based on the research aims and from previous literature. Comments were sought from other researchers in the field and modifications made. Response formats included multiple-choice, Likert scales, and free-text options. The questionnaire took no more than 10 minutes to complete. Potential participants were provided with a hyperlink to the online survey. The cover page outlined our inclusion criteria, and participants had to confirm that they were 16 years or older and consent to taking part before they could view the rest of the questionnaire. Responses were anonymous. The questionnaire had 41 questions divided into seven sections: demographics, sexuality and ethnicity, non-casual relationships, contacting/meeting MSM, experiences in gay venues and/or internet sites, sexual activities, and desire: the ideal man for a relationship and for casual sex.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institute of Work, Health & Organisations (University of Nottingham) Ethics Committee.

Results and discussion

Ninety-five people agreed to take part in the survey. Of these, 58 proceeded to answer some or all of the questions. Percentages were calculated for the total number of people who answered each particular question. Despite our attempts to distribute the questionnaire widely by post and via the internet, the response rate was low, which is not uncommon in BME LGB research.

Self-reported sexuality and identity of participants

Our sample had a wide age range and diversity in South and East Asian ethnicities. Respondents were aged between 16 and 60 years of age (Median=27.10, IQR=20.75 to 32.00). However, almost half the sample had up to postgraduate level of education. This was possibly due to our recruitment strategies, which included university societies, and our initial snow-balling from a university base. Nevertheless, there was a reasonable spread between employed, student, and unemployed groups, and parity between those born in the UK and outside (see Table 1 for participant characteristics).

Two participants (five per cent) were out to everyone, 13 (32 per cent) to some or all of their family, 25 (61 per cent) to some or all friends, and 12 (29 per cent) were out to no one. In terms of identity, 11 (30 per cent) saw themselves mainly as an Asian man, 10 (27 per cent) as a man who has sex with men, and 16 (43 per cent) saw themselves as either Asian or a man who has sex with men, depending on the situation. Ethnicity of the current partner was reported by 20 participants: nine partners (45 per cent) were White British/White Other, eight (40 per cent) were Indian or Pakistani, and three (15 per cent) were Black African/Caribbean. Participants were also asked about the ethnicities of their previous sexual partners. The majority of sexual partners had been White British (57 per cent) or South Asian (33 per cent), and less often Black African/Caribbean (seven per cent) or Chinese (two per cent).

Table 1: Participant characteristics*.

	<i>N</i> (%)
Education	
School	16 (27)
Degree	16 (27)
Postgraduate	28 (47)
Occupation	
Student	21 (35)
Employed	32 (53)
Unemployed	7 (12)
Ethnicity**	
Indian	22 (52)
Pakistani	10 (24)
Bangladeshi	1 (2)
Chinese	3 (7)
Other	6 (14)
Sexuality	
Gay	28 (67)
Bisexual	7 (17)
Heterosexual	2 (5)
Do not identify	2 (5)
Not sure	3 (7)
Relationship status	
Civil partnership	1 (3)
In a relationship with a man	11 (28)
Married to a woman	3 (8)
In a relationship with a woman	3 (8)
Single	22 (54)

* Percentages may not always add up to 100 in tables due to rounding.

**The specific ethnicity categories employed in this study have been adopted from the British census categories.

Seventeen per cent of the sample did not identify as being gay or bisexual. This is consonant with published literature on non-western sexual identities, and specifically with Asian non-heterosexual identifies (e.g. Gopinath, 2005; Khan, 2001) which challenges the hegemony and universality of Anglo-American understanding of conceptualisations and expressions of same-sex desire. This is perhaps a testament to the lack of generalisation of the 'global gay' identity, even among those residing in the UK. In fact, the rate of identifying as 'gay' is

perhaps inflated in this study as it was conducted in English. Linguistic resources are a prerequisite for positive self sexual-identification, for example, the use of the word 'gay' to self-identify, which are not always available to non-English speakers. However, with the globalisation of 'gay', non-English speakers may also use this word as a short-hand to explain and/or codify same-sex desire or behaviour. Therefore, the use of the word in such instances may have nothing to do with sexual identity or group affiliation. The inability, or refusal, of non-

heterosexual males to use the words 'gay' or 'bisexual', or the inappropriateness of such words as identity labels is an important factor that has repercussions for public health surveys and interventions. This finding from our study reinforces the idea that for ethnic minority MSMs the indiscriminate use of terms such as 'gay' or 'bisexual' may not be appropriate.

Sexual preference identity labels

'Discordance'⁴ between sexuality labels and practices were found in 10 per cent of men in this study. Discordance is perhaps indicative of the lack of importance attributed to sexual identity labels in some cultures, or that sexual desires are not codified in categories which are used in identity formation or maintenance. Discourses of sex and gender vary from context to context (Morris, 1994), and as Frable (1997) suggests, sexual identity is not only fluid, but is a construction by individuals, communities, and socio-historical events. This construction and co-construction of identities (between subjectship and context), is therefore in dynamic motion in an individual's consciousness; and any disclosure or emphasis of one identity over another needs to be deployed strategically (Fisher, 2003). While the use of sexual identity labels as vehicles of empowerment for some people needs to be acknowledged, their forceful assignment to individuals is not appropriate (cf: 'Come Out, Come Out, Wherever You Are'). It is also pertinent here to recall Bhabha's (1994) conceptualisation of identities, as never *a priori*, or finished products. The intersectionality of identities (particularly racial/ethnic identities and sexual identities) has been explored by Greene (1998) and Kumashiro (1999), amongst others, who have reported the identity flux, challenges, conflicts and negotiations required to develop and maintain a cohesive self-identity. In this study, equal proportions saw themselves as either

an Asian man or a man who has sex with men. This signifies a primacy of one identity over another for these individuals. It would be interesting for future research to explore the decision making process that went into this self-identity ordering.

Experience of the scene

Tables 2 and 3 summarises where respondents met gay/bisexual men. Social groups, through mutual friends, at a bar, pub or club, and websites were the most common avenues. It is noteworthy that 27 per cent of the sample never visited bars or nightclubs (the 'scene') and 19 per cent had never used the internet to contact gay/bisexual men. This is of significance, particularly given that some research (even our own!) and targeted sexual health interventions for MSM occur in such spaces. This means some BME gay men might not access safe sex information. Related to the notion of a sexual self-identity are the actions associated with this identity, which includes accessing social/sexual spaces. Ambivalent feelings associated with accessing the scene have been reported by Asian MSM (Bassi, 2006). This ambivalence has been attributed (at least in part) to the feeling of not belonging to the hegemonic 'queer white patriarchy' (Nast, 2002) that pervades gay discourse and spaces in the West. Nast's 'queer white patriarchy' finds embodiment in the young, healthy, financially well-off, able-bodied, White male. It is perhaps due to this lack of identification with the majority White clientele that 'specialised', 'ethnic gay' nights at nightclubs began to mushroom in the UK (see Bassi, 2006). In our sample, 39 per cent 'often' or 'sometimes' felt like an outsider on the scene because of their ethnicity. One approach that some BME men use to fit in, is to 'pass' as 'one of the boys', which is achieved by attempting to assimilate with the majority gay culture (see Kumashiro, 1999), but often at the expense of individuality, and

⁴ We use the term 'discordance' here to suggest that the conflict between dominant socially expected association between identity and practice and our participants' self/experiences.

sometimes even forsaking their own ethno-cultural background or keeping their ethnic identity private. While such ‘passing’ is possible and is practiced in online spaces (Poon et al., 2005); it may not be possible in physical spaces. In any case, such assimilationist positions are always unidirectional (Modood, 2005) and perpetuate hegemony, whereas integrationist and multi-culturalist perspectives enable difference in diversity.

The experience of the commercial scene for our respondents was largely positive (see Table 4). The majority reported no experience of physical abuse because of their race or ethnicity from staff or customers, but this was still an issue for some. There are other studies which suggest that such kind of abuse is rife (Dang & Hu, 2005; GALOP, 1998). Differences in reported rates of abuse vary across studies, and maybe a function of sampling (including geographical, legislative, socio-political) differences. However, laws themselves do not always tap the more

covert forms of racism that exist (see Chuang, 1999; GALOP, 2001). Thirty-five per cent of respondents in our study experienced verbal abuse because of their race/ethnicity, particularly from other customers. A London-based survey of under-25-year-old LGB youth (GALOP, 1998) found that 55 per cent attributed the verbal abuse that they experienced to a combination of gender and race, and 11 per cent felt this abuse was solely related to their race.

Experience on the cyber-scene

Approximately 80 per cent of respondents used the internet to contact other MSM. This concurs with other studies which have reported figures of 75 per cent (Benotsch et al., 2002) and 82 per cent (Bolding et al., 2004). This high rate of internet use may be related to a sampling effect, as a large part of our recruitment strategy was via the internet. It could also be because we had more students and employed people in our

Table 2: Sources of meeting gay/bisexual men (N=36).

Source	N (%)
Social groups	14(39)
Through mutual friends	14(39)
Bar, pub or club	13(36)
Backroom/sex club/sauna	5(14)
At work	4(11)
Public toilet	1(3)
Newspaper or magazine advert	3(8)
At a cruising ground	0(0)

Table 3: Frequency of visiting venues to meet men.

Visit...	Bars and nightclubs N (%)	Internet websites N (%)
Once a week	5 (13)	28(76)
Once a month	11 (29)	1(3)
Once a year	7 (18)	1(3)
Once in 6 months	5 (13)	0(0)
Never	10 (26)	7(19)

Table 4: Experiences in gay venues and/or internet sites.

Because of my race or ethnicity I have experienced...	Often N (%)	Sometimes N (%)	Rarely N (%)	Never N (%)
...verbal abuse from staff at gay venues	0 (0)	3 (9)	4 (13)	25 (78)
...physical abuse from staff at gay venues	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (9)	29 (91)
...verbal abuse from other customers at gay venues	0 (0)	3 (9)	9 (28)	20 (63)
...physical abuse from customers at gay venues	0 (0)	0 (0)	2 (6)	30 (94)
...verbal abuse on internet sites or chatrooms	2 (6)	2 (6)	9 (28)	19 (59)

sample, who are more likely to have internet access. Because the internet is a major forum for meeting other men, Asian MSM need to feel safe to use this forum without intimidation of verbal abuse. However, over one-third of our respondents experienced verbal abuse because of their race or ethnicity. A brief survey of the 'looking for...' section of profiles on two popular gay social/dating websites provided examples of 'Othering' and exclusion, which included statements such as 'Caucasians only' or 'No fats, no fems, no Asians' or 'Asians need not apply (sorry guys, you're just not my type)'. Such discourse has also been reported by others (see Han, 2008); Quan (n.d.) also found 'No GAMs (Gay Asian Males)' in profiles. Even the inclusion of such racial/ethnic categories (not for demographic statistics for use by webmasters, but for all registered members to view) could be argued is problematic, even if the responses to these categories are not mandatory, and privacy settings permit you to hide such information.

The foregoing discussion suggests that Asian MSM are not immune from racism within physical and virtual gay/bisexual spaces. While White LGB people are themselves (sexual) minorities who may experience disenfranchisement and/or disadvantages because of their minority status(es), this does not preclude them from discriminating against other minority groups. This is why the synergistic effects of belonging to metaminority groups (das Nair, 2006; Kumashiro, 1999) needs to be assessed. As Modood (2005) reminds us,

racism is not a unitary concept, and that there are multiple racisms, which include 'colour/phenotype forms but also cultural forms building on 'colour', or on a set of antagonistic or demeaning stereotypes based on alleged or real cultural traits' (p.3). This is particularly pertinent in commercial gay venues, where the body is primary (and perhaps, only) vehicle to negotiate desire: to show desire, and to feel desired.

Desire and race: Feeling desired by others

Participants were asked the frequency with which they felt desired by men of their own and other ethnic groups (see Table 5). Over one-third felt that they were not desired because of their race or ethnicity 'often' or 'sometimes', with 29 per cent reporting 'rarely' or 'never' feeling desired by White men. However, it was interesting to note that proportions were similar for feeling desired by White men and by men from one's own ethnic group. It is worth noting that almost half the sample 'rarely' or 'never' felt desired by men from other BME groups, and 24 per cent also reported that they felt that those from their own ethnic groups did not desire them. These figures are perhaps related to the phenomenon of internalised racism (see Han, 2007), which is considered later.

One of the factors that play a role with desire/dislike for men from particular racial/ethnic backgrounds is stereotypes. Stereotypes themselves don't have the power to hurt, but as Kumashiro (1999) suggests, does harm when it 'derives from a particular history of how that stereotype has been used

Table 5: Feeling desired by different ethnic groups.

I feel...	Often N (%)	Sometimes N (%)	Rarely N (%)	Never N (%)
...I am not desired because of my race or ethnicity	4 (12)	9 (27)	6 (18)	1 (44)
...I am sexually desired by White men	11 (32)	13 (38)	6 (18)	4 (12)
...sexually desired by men from my own ethnic group	13 (38)	13 (38)	4 (12)	4 (12)
...sexually desired by men from other Black and Minority Ethnic groups	7 (21)	9 (27)	11 (34)	6 (18)
...like an outsider in mainstream gay venues because of my ethnicity	7 (21)	6 (18)	8 (24)	1 (36) 2

and a particular community of people who have used that stereotype and who constitute that history' (p.494). The White Orientalist stereotype of the subservient, effeminate Asian man, with a small penis (ibid.); and the (diasporic) Asian notion of seeing other Asian men as siblings or competition (Chuang, 1999) or that they are 'not good in bed' (Poon et al., 2005, p.155), makes it difficult for Asian MSM to feel desired. It is noteworthy that only about three per cent of our sample reported being passive/bottoms, whereas 16 per cent were active/top, thereby going against the effeminate stereotype, which is often associated with bottom identity. In fact, even the notion of 'there are no Asian gays' is a stereotype held by both heterosexual Asians and LGB non-Asians (GALOP, 2001, p.19). Feeling undesired could also manifest as a feeling of Otherness. Roy (1998) captures the sentiment of mapping desire of the Asian body, even when viewed through the lens of another Asian (photographer) by stating, 'I had hoped that by controlling the camera we would be controlling the definition of erotic. But that definition had been set long ago by others; these pictures were just trying to live up to it' (p.274).

Male same-sex desire is largely framed through a (binary) gendered embodiment where masculinity (and hypermasculinity) is considered the dominant/ideal persona.

Masculinity, in turn, is partly constructed in a manner in which some body 'types' are considered more representative of the male gender and others are devalued (Kong, 2006). Kong describes three alternatives for the East Asian man to sexualise his body: attempt to mimic the dominant White body by 'bodybuilding or even body modification' (ibid, p.92); embrace the traditional Chinese idea of masculinity which is less dependent on body size or form (but on character and strength); or to exoticise his body to make it an object of desire (by playing to a particular stereotype). However, these options are not without their problems: biology can only be pushed to a limit that one's genetic make up will permit; traditional notions of masculinity/body-ideal, even if available, can only be embraced if social mores permit such adoption; and similarly, what is considered exotic is heavily dependent on dominant constructions of the erotic (which does not often include the South/East Asian body).

Desire and race: feelings of desire for others

It is not the intention of the preceding discussions to foreclose the possibility of racism *within* and *between* Asian communities, but only to highlight some of the difficulties that being non-White bring into the equation when negotiating desire in gay/bisexual spaces.

Respondents had the option to state whether there were men from specific ethnicities who they would not consider for a long-term relationship and for casual sex. Racial biases were expressed by 41 per cent, who stated they would not consider men from certain ethnic/racial backgrounds. As a free-text option was provided for this section, respondents said that they would not consider 'Muslims', 'any non-whites', 'oriental', and 'non-Indians', as potential partners. Black African, Caribbean, and Chinese men were dispreferred options. One respondent offered an explanation for his lack of desire for 'Afro-Caribbean' men: 'it's because there is a very high rate of HIV amongst Afro-Caribbean males'. Little is known about such racial serosorting, and perhaps warrants further investigation. However, 37 per cent stated having no racial preference when considering a man for a relationship. Where preference was stated, the majority desired men from their own ethnic group (34 per cent) or White men (23 per cent).

Not surprisingly, more people did not state a racial preference for a casual sex partner (about 50 per cent) than for a long-term relationship partner, but about 31 per cent maintained that they would not consider having sex with men from certain ethnic/racial backgrounds, mostly dispreferring Black African or Caribbean men (cf. Poon et al., 2005). When a preference was stated, 26 per cent preferred a White man and 15 per cent, a man of their own ethnic group. The latter statistic is interesting and can be linked to findings from previous studies (of East Asian men) who have reported that having sex with someone from the same ethnic background was akin to incest (Chuang, 1999; Han, 2007). However, when it comes to long-term relationships, at least for the Indian/Pakistani men in this sample, more than 30 per cent reported that they wanted it to be with another man from their own ethnic background. It is tempting to draw parallels with results from studies examining South Asian heterosexual rela-

tionships, whereby 'mixed (racial) relationships' were far less frequent in these populations compared to Black African and Caribbean or White populations (Berthoud, 2001), however, this data is not readily comparable to same-sex relationships, given the high rates of 'arranged' marriages amongst South Asian heterosexuals. Interestingly, one of our respondents reported being admonished by other Asian MSM when on the scene with a White partner, whereby he was asked '(to) stick to (his) own kind'.

Participants were asked to rank order what they considered to be the most important qualities in a partner for a relationship and a casual sexual partner. It is interesting to note that 'ethnicity' was consistently ranked fourth (after personality, looks, and age, for long-term relationships; and after looks, personality and age, for casual sex), only preceding wealth, on both dimensions. This suggests that race/ethnicity was not always a factor that was associated with desire, but was still a consideration that consciously or unconsciously affected decision-making processes related to sexual desire.

Internalised racism and homophobia

Internalised racism (IR) may not always be within the realm of the individual's consciousness, but studies have demonstrated their deleterious effects on the psychological well-being of the individual (Speight, 2007), such as low self-esteem (Szymanski & Gupta, 2009). IR, whilst not a universally accepted term or phenomenon, could lead to socially and contextually prescribed sexual roles for ethnic minority MSMs, which in turn, may also contribute to health risks among these groups (Han, 2008). Others have reported that the experiences of social discrimination have had an adverse impact on the well-being and health of BME-MSM (Wilson & Yoshikawa, 2004). It is perhaps a function of such internalised racist schema that some people in our survey preferred having a White partner compared to one from their own or other BME groups.

It must be noted here that the rice or curry queen is also marginalised, and stereotyped as being *infra dig*, and, therefore, not an identity worthy of proclaiming (Jackson, 2000).

In addition to the ethnicity/race-related challenges that South and East Asian MSM face, they also experience homophobia from the public in general, and their own ethnic communities (GALOP, 1998, 2001; Span & Vidal, 2003). This is another way in which such groups are 'doubly oppressed' (Kumashiro, 1999). Sixty-one per cent of our respondents experienced homophobia from their own ethnic groups and 25 per cent from other BME groups. Fewer respondents reported homophobia from White groups (42 per cent). Another study found that more Asian respondents compared to those from other ethnicities reported homophobic violence (Stonewall, 1996). Yip (2004) found that his South Asian Muslim participants reported that homosexuality, in their communities, was widely perceived as a 'Western disease'. This could be one factor that perpetuates homophobia within this group. Therefore, the lived experience of Asian MSM is a bricolage of intersections which predispose them to experience multiple sites of disenfranchisement from within and without their own race/ethnic and White LBG communities. But it is at these very faultlines that individuals with multiple (sometimes fraught) identities have the opportunity to negotiate their own identities in idiosyncratic and unprescribed ways, and it is these negotiations that need to be further explored in future research.

Conclusions

This study sought to explore how intersecting identities and/or experiences related to race/ethnicity and sexuality affect desires and experiences of South and East Asian MSM. Defining intersections is an unattainable task, however, because of the amorphous, unarticulated nature of some identities which makes it difficult to categorise them. As McCall (2005) states,

'theoretically, eventually, all groups will be challenged and fractured in turn' (p.1778). In fact, the exploration of this type of subalternity can only ever be *approached* and never fully actualised, because the very act of articulating one's subaltern position is a form of agency, thereby removing oneself from that position. Therefore, our study only focused on the experiences of those people for whom sexuality is a self-recognised category. But even then, there was discordance between sexual identity labels and sexual practices, with not everyone identifying as 'gay'/ 'bisexual'. We explored the experiences of accessing both physical and cyberspaces, and found that more than a quarter of our participants did not access gay/bi venues. These are people who are, therefore, likely to be missed in research and health promotion/ intervention programmes. While the experiences on the physical scene were largely positive, some people experienced physical abuse and even more experienced verbal abuse here, because of their race/ethnicity. Many more participants reported verbal abuse on the cyberscene. More than a third did not feel desired because of their race/ethnicity, and half did not feel desired by men from other BME groups, and just under a quarter did not feel desired by men from their own ethnic group. These factors may have led people to feel like an outsider at these venues. Ethnicity was not a major factor when participants considered a partner for a relationship or casual sex, but racialised prejudice in the form of dispreference for certain races/ethnicities was reported by 41 per cent. Sixty-one per cent experienced homophobia from their own ethnic groups, compared to the 41 per cent reported from White groups.

In concluding, we also need to address the study's limitations. We conceptualise these under the rubric of pragmatic study-specific issues and broader theoretical issues. The major limiting factors were the relatively small sample size and lack of representativeness of the sample. However, given the lack of research in this area, and the challenges

working with 'liminal' groups, this study still makes several inroads to understanding how desire is woven into the complex matrix of ethnicity and sexuality. Theoretically, despite its undertaking to interrupt dominant discourses that create and sustain subjugation, published literature on intersection-ality theory itself has often fallen victim to this, by emphasising race/ethnicity, sexuality, and class, over other factors which disadvantage people, such as mental and physical dis/ability. We must admit that our study is also complicit with this silencing of those with such disabilities. We therefore urge future researchers to continue pushing the boundaries of intersectionality research by incorporating *more* avenues (note: we do not/cannot say *all* avenues) that are involved in the business of subjugation, and being acutely aware of the (inadvertent) categorisation that such research may propagate.

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